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ROGER CHARTIER

Libraries Without Walls

> These examples made it possible for a librarian of genius to discover the fundamental law of the Library. This thinker observed that all the books, no matter how diverse they might be, are made up of the same elements: the space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. He also alleged a fact which travelers have confirmed: *In the vast Library there are no two identical books.* From these two incontrovertible premises he deduced that the Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, although vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages. Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of all books in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books. When it was proclaimed that the Library contained all books, the first impression was one of extravagant happiness.
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges[1]

WHEN IT WAS PROCLAIMED that the Library contained all books, the first impression was extravagant happiness." The dream of a library (in a variety of configurations) that would bring together all accumulated knowledge and all the books ever written can be found throughout the history of Western civilization. It underlay the constitution of great princely, ecclesiastical, and private "libraries"; it justified a tenacious search for rare books, lost editions, and texts that had disappeared; it commanded architectural projects to construct edifices capable of welcoming the world's memory.

Bringing together the entire written patrimony of humanity in one place proves an impossible task, though. When print produced a proliferation of titles and editions, it ruined all hope for an exhaustive collection. Even for those who hold that a library must be encyclopedic, selection is an absolute necessity. This was true for Gabriel Naudé in his *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, written in 1627 and addressed to Henri de Mesmes, *président* at the Parlement de Paris and a great book collector.[2] Against the model of the *cabinet curieux* or the *cabinet choisi* reserved for the delectation of their proprietor and gathering together a small number of books distinguished for their rarity or their luxury, Naudé pleads for a well-furnished library: "It is much more useful and necessary to have, for

example, a great quantity of books well bound in the ordinary fashion than to fill only some small, pale, gilded, and decorous room or cabinet enriched with all manner of little oddities [*mignardise*], luxuries, and superfluities."[3] A library is not built to satisfy egotistical enjoyments but because there is "no more honest and assured means for acquiring a great renown among the peoples than to erect handsome and magnificent Libraries in order then to dedicate and consecrate them to the use of the public."[4]

Ideally made up of an "infinity of good, singular, and remarkable" works, the library must nonetheless limit its ambitions and make choices:

> Still, in order not to leave this quantity infinite by not defining it, and also in order not to throw the curious out of all hope of being able to accomplish and come to the end of this handsome enterprise, it seems to me that it is appropriate to do as the Physicians do, who order the quantity of drugs according to their quality, and to say that one cannot lack gathering all those [books] that have the qualities and conditions required for being put in a Library.[5]

Naudé's *Advis* thus functions to guide the collector as he makes necessary selections and takes the appropriate "precautions," since Naudé indicates the authors and the works absolutely indispensable for his library.

The division between the books that one absolutely must possess and those that might (or must) be left aside is only one of the ways to mitigate the problem of the impossibility of a universal library. There were other ways, which the language of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicated with the very term defining the place in which the books were kept: *bibliothèque*. In the entry for that word in Furetière's *Dictionnaire* (1690) the first definition is the most traditional meaning: "*Bibliothèque*: Apartment or place destined for putting books; gallery, building full of books. Also said in general of the books that are placed in this vessel." Next comes a second meaning designating a book rather than a place: "*Bibliothèque* is also a Collection, a Compilation of several works of the same nature or of Authors who have compiled all that can be [compiled] on the same subject."

The Latin terms for a collection vary considerably in these titles: *thesaurus*, *corpus*, *catalogus*, *flores*, and so forth. In French the genre was usually qualified as a *bibliothèque*. Four years after the publication of Furetière's *Dictionnaire*, the *Dictionnaire* of the Académie Française bore witness to this preference: "One also calls *Bibliothèques* Collections and Compilations of works of like nature." Three examples follow the definition: "*La Bibliothèque des Pères*, *La Nouvelle Bibliothèque des Pères*, *La Bibliothèque du Droit François*."

Eighteenth-century bookseller-publishers published great numbers of these multiple-volume collections gathering together published works in a given genre such as novels, tales, or travel accounts. Many collections, however, made use of both the formula and the term inaugurated by the Amsterdam periodicals of Jean Le Clerc, the *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* (1686–93), the *Bibliothèque choisie*

(1703–13), and the *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne: Pour servir de suite aux Bibliothèques universelle et choisie* (1714–27). In all, there were thirty-one periodical publications in the French language, some of which lasted longer than others, that were offered under the title of *bibliothèque* between 1686 and 1789.[6] The term was used throughout the century, with seventeen titles published before 1750 and fourteen after. Several of these publications were not periodicals, properly speaking, but imposing collections of texts related by their genre or their targeted audience. One such was the *Bibliothèque universelle des romans* (1775–89, comprising 224 volumes in duodecimo format), which was presented as a "periodical work in which is given the reasoned analysis of Novels ancient and modern, French or translated into our language," which published extracts and summaries, historical and critical notes, unabridged texts of novels, and tales both traditional and original.[7] Another was the *Bibliothèque universelle des dames* (1785–97, comprising 156 octodecimo-sized volumes), which had encyclopedic ambitions, given that it contained travel narratives, novels, works of history, morality, mathematics and astronomy, physics and natural history, and all the liberal arts.

These imposing "libraries," along with the encyclopedias and the dictionaries, constituted a major part of the great publishing ventures of the eighteenth century. As Louis-Sébastien Mercier noted, they guaranteed the diffusion of knowledge—or at least of literary pleasure—and they provided a living for a multitude of the people who were scornfully called *demi-littérateurs* or *écrivailleurs*.[8] The "libraries," which aimed at being exhaustive and universal in any given genre or domain, had a counterpoint in the eighteenth century in a vast number of equally popular small, concise, and easily handled volumes named *extraits*, *esprits*, *abrégés*, *analyses*, and so forth.[9]

The smaller, portable anthologies were another form of "library" produced by the book trade. Even if both genres offered extracts, their intention was not the same. The smaller works aimed at eliminating, selecting, and reducing rather than accumulating a multitude of separate and dispersed works in one collection, periodical or not. If the collections in a *bibliothèque* were constructed with the aim of accomplishing the impossible task of assembling for every reader all the books concerning a particular subject, an appeal to *analyse* and *esprit* implied that such a task was useless or harmful, and that the necessary knowledge—available in a small number of works—needed to be concentrated or distilled like a chemical substance. In that belief the compilers of portable anthologies agreed with the utopian writers of the century who rejected encyclopedic libraries as overencumbered and superfluous and permitted only a very few books in their ideal library.

In his utopia (more accurately, his "uchronia") of 1771, *L'An 2440*, Louis-Sébastien Mercier pays a visit to the library of the king and finds it to be somewhat singular: "In place of those four galleries of immense length, which contained many thousands of volumes, I could only find one small cabinet, in which were

several books that seemed to me far from voluminous." Intrigued, Mercier asks the librarian what has happened, and the librarian answers that before burning all the books judged to be "either frivolous or useless or dangerous," the enlightened men of the twenty-fifth century saved the essential, which took up little room: "As we are neither unjust nor like the Saracens, who heated their baths with masterworks, we made a choice: wise men extracted the substance from a thousand in-folio volumes, all of which they transferred into a small duodecimo-sized volume, somewhat in the same way that the skilful chemists who extract the virtue from plants concentrate it in a flask and throw out the vulgar liquors."[10] The tension between the exhaustive and the essential thus ordered the complex and contradictory relations linking the library, in its usual spatial and architectural sense, to print genres (only some of which were called *bibliothèques*)—relations that assigned to the "library" as a book, be it one volume or one of a series, the functions of accumulation or selection attributed to the library as a place.[11]

But a library was not only a place or a collection. Furetière's *Dictionnaire* proposes a third definition of the term (not found in the more concise entry of the *Dictionnaire* of the Académie): "One also calls *Bibliothèque* the books that contain the Catalogs of the books in the *Bibliothèques*. Gesner, Possevin, Photius, have made *Bibliothèques*. . . . Father Labbé, a Jesuit, has made the *Bibliothèque des bibliothèques* in an octavo-sized book that contains only the catalogue of the names of those who have written *Bibliothèques*."[12] For anyone who might wish to design an open and universal library, the possession of such catalogs was a necessity. The sum of their titles defined an ideal library freed from the constraints imposed by any one actual collection and overflowing the limits inherent in anthologies and compilations by the immaterial construction of a sort of library of all libraries in which nothing, or almost nothing, was lacking. Thanks to the circulation of the catalogs, the closed world of individual libraries could be transformed into an infinite universe of books noted, reviewed, visited, consulted, and, eventually, borrowed.

Furetière's definition slips from catalogs of particular holdings toward another sort of work. A "library" is not only the inventory of the books assembled in a specific place; it can be an inventory of all the books ever written on a given subject or by all the authors of a given nation. Thus Furetière notes: "In France, there is not yet a general *Bibliothèque* of all the Authors. There are particular ones by the Sieur La Croix du Maine Manceau and Anthoine Du Verdier. Spain has one by Nicolas Anthonio. There is also a *Bibliothèque d'Espagne* of Peregrinus, and the [*Bibliothèque*] *Des Escrivains Espagnols* by André Schot in 1608."[13] Thus the genre that the *Dictionnaire* evokes and designates with the term *bibliothèque* is defined according to two criteria: it lists authors, and it respects the national (French or Spanish) framework.

At the end of the seventeenth century such "libraries" already had a long history.[14] Three such works had appeared before 1550, the *Cathalogus illustrium*

virorum Germaniae suis ingeniis et lucubrationibus omnifariam exornantium of Johann Tritheim (Mainz, 1495), the *Bibliotheca Universalis, sive Catalogus omnium scriptorum locupletissimus, in tribus linguis, Latina, Graeca, et Hebraica* of Conrad Gesner (Zurich, 1545), and the *Illustrium Maioris Britanniae Scriptorum* of John Bale (Ipswich, 1548). These three works have several traits in common: they are written in Latin, they list for the most part ancient authors, and they privilege works written in the classical languages. Gesner innovated by launching a new usage of *bibliotheca* that detaches the word from its material definition and invests the library without walls proposed in his book with universality. Finally, the three works differ in their organization: Tritheim and Bale chose a chronological structure (the latter specifying "in quasdam centurias divisum cum diversitate doctrinarum atque; annorum recta supputatione per omnes aetates a Iapheto sanctissimi Noah filio, ad annum domini M.D. XLVIII"), providing an alphabetical index to make the work easier to consult. Once again Gesner stands alone, opting for alphabetical order but in the medieval style (unlike Tritheim and Bale) and classifying his authors by their baptismal names—that is, their first names. The declared universality of his *Bibliotheca* presupposes an exhaustive survey that retains ancients and contemporaries, printed texts and manuscript texts, learned authors and less learned authors.[15]

When Anton Francesco Doni published his *Libraria . . . Nella quale sono scritti tutti gl'Autori vulgari con cento discorsi sopra quelli: Tutte le tradutioni fatte dell'altre lingue, nella nostra e una tavola generalmente come si costuma fra Librari* (Venice, 1550), he inaugurated a new mode of presentation in this genre.[16] He innovated in three ways: first, in language, since the *Libraria* reviewed only authors or translators in the vernacular and is itself written in the vulgar tongue. Furthermore, the intention of the book was new: it contains no inventory of all authors, no collection of judgments. Rather, it is primarily designed to provide information on titles available in the vernacular: "I have made this library only to give knowledge of all the books printed in the vulgar language so that people who like to read in our language may know how many works have been published and what [they are], not to judge which are good and which bad." The third novelty consisted in the work's format. Doni abandoned large formats (the quarto of Tritheim and Bale, the infolio of Gesner) to publish his *Libraria* in a more manageable duodecimo format that the reader who haunted bookshops in search of the titles suggested by this ideal library (again, without walls) could easily carry with him.

The small volume of the *Libraria* published in 1550 had 144 pages and listed 159 authors, arranged in alphabetical order by their first names (from Acarisio da Cento to Vincenzo Rinchiera). Doni plays learned games with the fourteen letters of the alphabet around which his nomenclature is organized. The initial of the given name of the authors listed in a section was also the initial of the given name of the dedicatee mentioned in a preamble heading the section, as well as the initial of the first word in that brief text (for example, the *A* section was

headed, "Abate Abati. Assai son l'opere . . ."). After this list of all the authors who had published in the vulgar tongue, Doni provides three other lists: a typology of vernacular genres, an inventory of texts translated from Latin into Italian, and a "Tavola Generale di tutti libri volgari" in the form of a bookseller's catalog but without bibliographic information on specific editions.

A year after this first book Doni published *La Seconda Libraria* listing texts that had not yet been printed. The principle in this work, an alphabetical inventory, was the same as in the first. As Amedeo Quondam has noted, the *Libraria* of manuscript works—"of Books that the Author has seen in manuscript and which are not yet printed"—is largely fictional, enumerating invented authors and imaginary titles. It provides something like a "paradoxical and ironic double" to the *Libraria* that surveys published works.[17] Doni's two *librarie* form a complex book. Their bibliographic definition ("they were not only the first Italian national bibliographies; they were also the first bibliographies in a vulgar tongue")[18] fails to do justice to their multiple significance. They proclaim the excellence and the dignity achieved by the vulgar language; they constitute a repertory of contemporary authors; they dismantle, in a parodic key, the recipes for literary invention.

Doni's work was known in France, where it gave direct inspiration to two "libraries," the one published in 1584 by François de La Croix du Maine and the other published in 1585 by Antoine du Verdier.[19] These two works share an interest in demonstrating the superiority of the French language over the Italian by citing the number of authors who wrote in the vernacular, by the fact that French had been used as a literary language longer than Italian, and by the scope of the learning of French expression. This intention is explicit in the *Premier volume de la Bibliothèque du Sieur de La Croix du Maine: Qui est un catalogue général de toutes sortes d'Autheurs, qui ont escrit en François depuis cinq cents ans et plus, jusques à ce jourd'huy* (Paris, 1584). La Croix du Maine compares, to the advantage of France, the "three thousand authors" (in fact 2,031) inventoried in his "catalog" and the three hundred (in fact 159) who figured in Doni's *Libraria*.

In *La Bibliothèque d'Antoine Du Verdier, Seigneur de Vauprivas: Contenant le Catalogue de tous ceux qui ont escrit, ou traduict in François, et autres Dialectes de ce Royaume* (Lyons, 1585) recognition of the superiority of France does not refer explicitly to Italy. The model from which Du Verdier took inspiration was not Doni but Gesner: "In our times Conrad Gesner has gathered together all Authors whatsoever in three languages, Hebraic, Greek, and Latin, to his great honor and the common benefit." It was in reference to that ancient knowledge and that great example that Du Verdier constructed the catalog by which he intended to prove the excellence of the moderns. Du Verdier simply surveys modern authors "from sixty or seventy years past," whom he finds sufficiently numerous and excellent to obviate any need to name older writers, since before that time "our [authors] were somewhat heavy in their writings."

There are obvious similarities between Doni's *Libraria* and La Croix du Maine's *Bibliothèque*. Both inventory books (printed and in manuscript) written or translated into the vulgar tongue; both offer brief biographies of some of the authors whose works they list; both classify authors in strict alphabetical order by author's given name.

There are nonetheless fundamental differences arising from their quite different ways of conceiving the library without walls. First, there is a physical and formal difference between the two works: far from being a manageable small-format book in the manner of the *Libraria*, La Croix du Maine's *Bibliothèque* was a majestic folio volume, a *libro da banco*, to use Armando Petrucci's terminology, not a *libro da bisaccia* (saddlebag book) or a *libretto da mano* (little handbook).[20] Anton Francesco Doni's *Libraria* was founded on the practice of literary novelties; La Croix du Maine's *Bibliothèque* was based on the scholastic tradition of commonplace books. A literate man without originality, but not without prolixity, La Croix du Maine scrupulously calculated his compilation activities. He states that he wrote three hours per day, figuring that if in one hour he filled one sheet of paper of over one hundred lines, his yearly production was some one thousand sheets. It is certain that his work was organized intellectually according to the principle of the notebook or the commonplace book and that it gathered under one heading extracts from various authors' works. Hence the central importance that La Croix du Maine gave to the instruments for putting order into this proliferating material.

La Croix du Maine's work also differed from Doni's in that the *Premier Volume* of his *Bibliothèque* was "dedicated and presented to the King," whose engraved portrait figured on the page facing the dedication addressed to him. In both the *Desseins, ou Projects* of 1583 and the *Premier Volume de la Bibliothèque* published the following year, La Croix du Maine pursued the same aim of obtaining the sovereign's protection, which had cash value in terms of gratifications and posts. The originality of this "notice to erect a library," which preceded Naudé's project by a half century, lay in La Croix du Maine's desire to embody the immaterial and universal library of *loci communes* in a real library, one of whose bookcases (one of the *cent Buffets*) is depicted in the work.

Thus it was on the basis of the practice of the commonplace book that the totally original system of classification proposed by La Croix du Maine should be understood.[21] The work was divided into seven "orders": "sacred things," "arts and sciences," "descriptions of the Universe both in general and in particular," "the human race," "famous men in War," "the works of God," and "miscellanies of various Memoirs," subdivided into a total of 108 "classes." Unlike the twenty-one categories in Gesner's *Pandectarum sive Partitionum universalium . . . libri XXI* (Zurich, 1548), this organization was not intended to construct a tree of knowledge that proceeded by successive divisions. In Gesner's work, the *artes et scientia*

that make up *philosophia* were divided into *substantiales* (subdivided into *physica* or *naturali philosophia*, *metaphysica et theologia gentilium*, *ethica* or *morali philosophia*, *oeconomica*, *politica*, *jurisprudentia*, *medicina*, *theologia christiana*) and *praeparantes*. The latter category was subdivided into *ornantes* (*historia*, *geographia*, *divinatio et magia*, and *artes illiteratae et mechanicae*) and *necessariae*. These latter are further divided into *mathematicae* (*arithmetica*, *geometria*, *musica*, *astronomia*, and *astrologia*), and *sermocinales*, which were *grammatica et philologia*, *dialectica*, *rhetorica*, and *poetica*. A "Tabula de singulis pandectarum libris" arranged the various bibliographical classes according to a systematic order—the order of the divisions of *philosophia*, understood as a trajectory of knowledge leading from the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* to Christian theology. Unlike Gesner's taxonomy, the one proposed by La Croix du Maine has no overall governing system, but simply juxtaposes convenient headings in view of gathering together extracts and commonplaces. The fourth "order," for example, includes the bookcases devoted to "Man and what is dependent on him," "Diseases of Men and their remedies," "Illustrious and other Women," "Worldly Wisdom, or Instruction for men," "Divers exercises of Nobles and Gentlemen," "Miscellaneous exercises for the mind or the body," "Divers traffics and commerce of men on sea and on land," "Divers customs and fashions of living everywhere in the universe," "Men of honest exercise," and "Officers of long robe, or of the Judiciary."

Because it was to be an example worthy of being imitated, the "perfect and accomplished" library set up by the king was to be "the means for rendering the less learned or the totally ignorant well informed and knowledgeable, and also to make the vice-ridden exercise virtue if they conform to their Prince." Similarly, only the approval of the king could give authority to the *Premier Volume de la Bibliothèque* published in 1584 and to all the other books that were supposed to follow it. At the end of his dedicatory epistle, signed "FRANÇOIS DE LA CROIX DV MAINE, the anagram for which is RACE DV MANS, SI FIDEL' A SON ROY," La Croix du Maine suggests a more concrete version of the connection with the sovereign: "If your Majesty should desire to know what are the other [volumes] that I have written and composed for the ornamentation and illustration of your so famous and flourishing Kingdom, I am ready to provide a reading (when it may please you to so command me) of the Discourse that I had printed five years ago touching the general catalog of my works." Doni's *Libraria* had multiple dedicatees (one for each letter of the alphabet) and was aimed at a broader audience. La Croix du Maine's *Bibliothèque* supposes an exclusive relationship, established in proximity by reading aloud, between an author in search of protection and the monarch whose patronage he seeks.

A final difference between Doni's work and that of La Croix du Maine is that the Florentine's work was solidly connected with publishing activities; it was "constructed in direct contact with (and probably backed by) two of the publishers of

greatest cultural importance in the mid-sixteenth century," the Venetians Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari, the publisher of the first edition and of the complete edition of the work, and Francesco Marcolini, the publisher of the *Seconda Libraria*.[22] La Croix du Maine's work originated in the construction of his private library, begun in his university years. That was the collection of printed books and manuscript memoirs that La Croix du Maine had transported to Paris in 1582.

The library that La Croix du Maine gathered together and, in part, produced provided support for all his undertakings. The library published in 1584 was in fact little more than an *epitomé* of a more ambitious undertaking, the projected *Grande Bibliothèque Françoise* (and its twin, a *Bibliothèque Latine*).

Imitating Gesner, La Croix du Maine added to his *Bibliothèques* volumes of *Pandectes Latines et Françoises* ("to wit, a very ample Catalogue of all the Authors who have written in each art, science, or profession of studies, which I have divided according to the seven arts that we call liberal") and several volumes of what he called a *mentionnaire*, "which is like a book of commonplaces, or an Aggregation of authors who have made mention of particular things."

Three different principles of classification exist concurrently in La Croix du Maine's works. The first organizing criterion is the category of the author. The author function, as Foucault defines it, is already sketched out here.[23] In his only published volume, as in his *Grande Bibliothèque*, La Croix du Maine makes this the basic criterion for assigning discourses, which are organized alphabetically by their authors' given names. In announcing that he will provide authors' "lives" (written, according to La Croix du Maine, in imitation of Suetonius, Plutarch, and Paolo Giovio), he equates men of letters with military leaders, famous for their exploits, and with princes and grandees, masters of their deeds.

Nonetheless, this first scheme for assigning works did not neglect the power of patronage. La Croix du Maine demonstrates this when he promises to indicate, for all the works mentioned in his unpublished *Grande Bibliothèque*, "*above all* [emphasis mine] the name of those men and women to whom they were dedicated, without omitting their full and entire qualities." A work thus belongs as much to the person to whom it has been dedicated as it does to the person who has written it and, in the ideal library as on the title page, the two names of the author and the patron stood as proof of this.

A third criterion for classifying works eliminates assignment to an individual in favor of placing each work within an order or class of knowledge. It is the tension between a proper name and a commonplace category that underlies Gesner's dual enterprise, the *Bibliotheca universalis* of 1545 and the *Pandectarum . . . libri XXI* three years later—a work that was presented as "Secondus hic Bibliothecae nostrae Tomus est, totius philosophiae et omnium bonarum artium atque studiorum Locos communes et Ordines universales simul et particulares com-

plectens." That same tension is reflected in La Croix du Maine's bibliographic zeal, even though his grandiose projects were never realized.

The almost simultaneous publication of the two *Bibliothèque*s (May 1584 for La Croix du Maine; 1585, with an end printing date of 15 December 1584, for Du Verdier) raises a problem. La Croix du Maine took the initiative and preempted any possible accusation that he had plagiarized a work as yet unpublished, but whose publication he knew was imminent, as shown by the entry under "Antoine du Verdier" in the *Premier Volume de la Bibliothèque*. Declaring that he had never known of the existence of Du Verdier's work, La Croix du Maine claimed anteriority for his own venture, begun more than fifteen years before. He stressed the great distance ("more than a hundred leagues") that separated their places of residence, Paris and Lyons, where Du Verdier had settled in 1580 and held the post of *contrôleur général des finances*. For good measure, La Croix du Maine stated his scorn of plagiarism, and he founded the authority of his own book on the resources of his library and on his own knowledge: "As for the authors I have mentioned in my work, I have seen or read them, and have them still before me for the most part without having borrowed them." As in the travel narrations of the age, *auto-psie*—the action of seeing with one's own eyes ("I have seen them") became the exclusive guarantee of truth. That certification of authenticity through direct experience is not without paradox in an author who compiled extracts and commonplaces in innumerable notebooks that he then presented as learning itself.

Du Verdier, who was first a financial officer in the election of Forez, then *contrôleur général des finances*,[24] weighed heavier in the social scales than La Croix du Maine, a simple provincial gentleman who had moved to Paris. Du Verdier's response was two-pronged: first, he mocked the erudite rodomontades of his rival and expressed doubts about the existence of the many works La Croix du Maine promised. Furthermore, after Du Verdier examined the work in question (which he lists as being currently printed in Paris in his entry "François de La Croix du Maine" in his own *Bibliothèque*), he questioned the accuracy of the information given by La Croix du Maine because the latter surveyed fictitious or unproductive authors, including in his work "several [authors] that never were in nature, or if they were, have written nothing, as he himself confesses."

In its format (a heavy folio volume) and in its form (organized alphabetically by name), Antoine Du Verdier's *Bibliothèque* is akin to La Croix du Maine's work, but it is constructed on a different principle. Du Verdier's immaterial library is not directly dependent on the constitution of the author's own collection but is rather a conceptual entity detached from any particular material presence. Du Verdier's catalog is indeed a "library," but it is an all-inclusive library. In this exhaustive inventory every reader must be able to find what he or she needs and use that information to construct a library made up of real books.

It was in order to facilitate that task that Antoine Du Verdier gave the bibliographic information that was lacking in the *epitomé* published by La Croix du Maine. There was thus no contradiction between the design of a "universal library of French books," which necessarily had no physical reality, and the making of a bibliographic instrument useful to all who might want to create a collection.

The various meanings given to the term *bibliothèque* thus clearly show one of the major tensions that inhabited literate persons of the early modern age and caused them anxiety. A universal library (or at least universal in one order of knowledge) cannot be other than immaterial, reduced to the dimensions of a catalog, a nomenclature, or a survey. Conversely, any library that is actually installed in a specific place and that is made up of real works available for consultation and reading, no matter how rich it might be, gives only a truncated image of all accumulable knowledge. The irreducible gap between ideally exhaustive inventories and necessarily incomplete collections was experienced with intense frustration. It led to extravagant ventures assembling—in spirit, if not in reality—all possible books, all discoverable titles, all works ever written. "When it was proclaimed that the Library contained all books, the first impression was one of extravagant happiness."

As the twentieth century wanes, our dream is to be able to surmount the contradiction that has long haunted Western Europeans' relationship with the book. The library of the future seems indeed to be in a sense a library without walls, as were the libraries that Gesner, Doni, and La Croix du Maine erected on paper. Unlike their catalogs, which furnished authors' names, the titles of works, and at times summaries of or extracts from the works, the library of the future is inscribed where all texts can be summoned, assembled, and read—on a screen. In the world of remote relays made possible by digital and electronic communications, texts are no longer prisoners of their original physical, material existence. Separated from objects, texts can be transmitted; there is no longer a necessary connection between the place in which they are conserved and the place in which they are read. The opposition, long held to be insurmountable, between the closed world of any finite collection and the infinite universe of all the texts ever written is thus theoretically annihilated: now the catalog of all catalogs, ideally listing the totality of written production, corresponds to electronic access to texts universally available for consultation.

This projection of the future, written here in the present tense, retains something of the basically contradictory utopias proposed by Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Etienne Boullée. Still, it is perhaps not too soon to reflect on the effects of the change that the projection promises and announces. If texts are emancipated from the form that has conveyed them since the first centuries of the Christian

era—the *codex*, the book composed of signatures from which all printed objects with which we are familiar derive—by the same token all intellectual technologies and all operations working to produce meaning become similarly modified. "Forms effect meanings," D. F. McKenzie reminds us,[25] and his lesson, which should be taken to heart, warns us to be on guard against the illusion that wrongly reduces texts to their semantic content. When it passes from the *codex* to the monitor screen the "same" text is no longer truly the same because the new formal mechanisms that deliver it to the reader modify the conditions of its reception and its comprehension.

When the text is transmitted by a new technique and embodied in a new physical form, it can be subjected to manipulation by a reader who is no longer limited, as with the printed book, to adding hand-written notes in the spaces left blank in typographic composition.[26] At the same time, the end of the *codex* will signify the loss of acts and representations indissolubly linked to the book as we now know it. In the form it has acquired in Western Europe since the beginning of the Christian era, the book has been one of the most powerful metaphors used for conceiving of the cosmos, nature, and the human body.[27] If the object that has furnished the matrix of this repertory of images (poetic, philosophical, scientific) should disappear, the references and the procedures that organize the "readability" of the physical world, equated with a book in *codex* form, would be profoundly upset as well.

To realize the dream of the Renaissance bibliographers of making the particular place in which the reader finds himself coincide perfectly with universal knowledge, thus putting that knowledge within his grasp, inevitably presupposes a new definition of the concept of the text, wrenched away from its immediate association (so evident to us) with the specific form of the book—the *codex*—that some seventeen or eighteen centuries ago replaced another form, the *volumen* or scroll.[28] The historian's musings presented here lead to a question essential for the present—not the overworked question of the supposed disappearance of writing, which is more resistant than has been thought, but the question of a possible revolution in the forms of its dissemination and appropriation.

—Translated by Lydia Cochrane

Notes

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York, 1964), 54–55.
2. Gabriel Naudé, *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, reproduction of the 1644 edition, with preface by Claude Jolly, "L'*Advis*, manifeste de la bibliothèque érudite" (Paris,

1990). On Naudé's text, see Jean Viardot, "Livres rares et practiques bibliophiliques," in *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier, 4 vols. (Paris, 1982–86), vol. 2, *Le livre triomphant: 1660–1830*, 446–67, esp. 448–50; Viardot, "Naissance de la bibliophilie: Les Cabinets de livres rares," in *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1988–91), vol. 2, *Les Bibliothèques sous l'Ancien Régime, 1530–1789*, ed. Claude Jolly, 269–89, esp. 270–71.

3. Naudé, *Advis*, 104. 4. Ibid., 12. 5. Ibid., 37.
6. Jean Sgard, ed., *Dictionnaire des journaux, 1600–1789* (Paris, 1991), nos. 144–74.
7. Roger Poirier, *La Bibliothèque universelle des romans: Rédacteurs, textes, publics* (Geneva, 1977).
8. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris: Nouvelle Édition revue et augmentée*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1782–83), vol. 6, *Dictionnaires*, 294–95.
9. For example, → Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "L'Histoire des Deux Indes' et ses 'extraits': Un Mode de dispersion textuelle au XVIIIe siècle," *Littérature* 69 (1988): 28–41 (special issue on "Intertextualité et Révolution").
10. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais*, ed. Raymond Trousson (Bordeaux, 1971), chap. 28, "La Bibliothèque du roi," 247–71. For quotations, see 247–78 and 250–51.
11. Jean-Marie Goulemot, "En guise de conclusion: Les Bibliothèques imaginaires (fictions romanesques et utopies)," in *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, 2:500–511.
12. Furetière was alluding not only to the *Bibliotheca universalis* of Gesner but also to Antonio Possevino, S.J., *Bibliotheca selecta qua agitur de ratione studiorum* (Rome, 1593; Venice, 1603; Cologne, 1607); Photius, *Myriobiblion sive Bibliotheca librorum quos legit et censuit Photius . . . Graece edidit David Hoeschelius . . . et notis illustravit, latine vero reddidit et scholiis auxit Andreas Schottus* (Rouen, 1653, after the Greek and Latin eds. published in Augsburg in 1601 and 1606); Philippe Labbé, S.J., *Bibliotheca bibliothecarum curis secundis auctior* (Paris, 1664; Rouen, 1672).
13. The two Spanish "libraries" that Furetière mentions are Nicolás Antonio, *Bibliotheca hispana, sive Hispanorum qui . . . scripto aliquid consignaverunt notitia* (Rome, 1672; 1696); and Andreas Schott [or Andreas Schott Peregrinus], S.J., *Hispaniae bibliotheca, seu de academiciis ac bibliothecis; item elogia et nomenclator clarorum Hispaniae scriptorum* (Frankfurt, 1608).
14. Theodore Besterman, *The Beginnings of Systematic Bibliography* (Oxford, London, 1935); Luigi Balsamo, *La bibliografia: Storia di una tradizione* (Florence, 1984), available in English as *Bibliography: History of a Tradition*, trans. William A. Pettas (Berkeley, 1990). Helmut Zedelmaier, *Bibliotheca Universalis und Bibliotheca Selecta: Das Problem der Ordnung das gelehrten Wissens in der frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne, 1992), was published after this essay was written.
15. There is an abundant bibliography on Gesner as a bibliographer: see Jens Christian Bay, "Conrad Gesner (1516–1565), The Father of Bibliography: An Appreciation," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 10 (1916): 53–88, published separately as *Conrad Gesner, The Father of Bibliography: An Appreciation* (Chicago, 1916); Paul-Emile Schazmann, "Conrad Gesner et les débuts de la bibliographie universelle," *Libri*, 1952–53, 37–49; Josef Mayerhöfer, "Conrad Gesner als Bibliograph und Enzyklopädist," *Gesnerus* 3/4 (1965): 176–94; Hans Widman, "Nachwort," in Konrad Gesner, *Bibliotheca Universalis und Appendix* (Osnabrück, Germ., 1966), i–x → Hans Fischer, "Conrad Gesner (1516–1565) as Bibliographer and Encyclopedist," *Library*, 5th ser., 21 (1966): 269–81; Hans H. Wellisch, "Conrad Gesner: A Bio-Bibliography," *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History* (1975): 151–247, 2nd ed., rev. and

published under the same title (Zug, Switz., 1984); Luigi Balsamo, "Il canone bibliografico di Konrad Gesner e il concetto di biblioteca pubblica nel Cinquecento," in *Studi di biblioteconomia e storia del libro in onore di Francesco Barberi* (Rome, 1976), 77–96; Joseph Hejmic and Václav Bok, *Gesner europaïsche Bibliographie und ihre Beziehung zum Späthumanissmus in Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague, 1988); Alfredo Serrai, *Conrad Gesner*, ed. Maria Cochetti, with a bibliography of Gesner's works by Marco Menato (Rome, 1990).

16. For a reprint of this text, see Anton Francesco Doni, *La libraria*, ed. Vanni Bramanti (Milan, 1972). See also Cecilia Ricottini Marsili-Libelli, *Anton Francesco Doni, scrittore e stampatore* (Florence, 1960); Amedeo Quondam, "La letterature in tipografia," in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa, 8 vols. (Turin, 1983), vol. 2, *Produzione e consumo*, 555–686, esp. 620–36.
17. Quondam, "La letteratura in tipografia," 628–29.
18. Besterman, *Beginnings of Systematic Bibliography*, 23.
19. I shall quote from Du Verdier's and La Croix du Maine's works from the copies in the Bibliothèque nationale de Paris. On these two *Bibliothèque*s, see Claude Longeon, "Antoine Du Verdier et François de La Croix du Maine," *Actes du Colloque Renaissance-Classicisme du Maine* (Le Mans, 1971; Paris, 1975), 213–33.
20. Armando Petrucci, "Alle origini del libro moderno: Libri da banco, libro da bisaccia, libretti da mano," in *Libri, scrittura e pubblico nel Rinascimento: Guida storica e critica*, ed. Armando Petrucci (Laterza, 1979), 213–33.
21. On the history of classification, see the very dogmatic E. I. Samurin, *Geschichte der bibliothekarisch-bibliographischen Klassifikation*, 2 vols., originally published in Russian (Moscow, 1955; Leipzig, 1964); on La Croix du Maine, vol. 1, 106–9. Samurin's *Geschichte* is also available as a single volume (Munich, 1977). See also Henri-Jean Martin, "Classements et conjonctures," in *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. Martin and Chartier, vol. 1, *Le Livre conquérant: Du Moyen Age au milieu du XVIIe siècle*, 429–41.
22. Quondam, "La letteratura in tipografia," 623.
23. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?", *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 44 (1969): 73–104, reprinted in *Littoral* 9 (1983): 3–32. Also available in English as "What Is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structural Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), 141–60.
24. Claude Longeon, "Antoine Du Verdier (11 novembre 1544–25 septembre 1600)," in *Les Écrivains foréziens du XVIe siècle: Répertoire bio-bibliographique* (Saint-Etienne, France, 1970), 288–316.
25. D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London, 1986), 4.
26. Roger E. Stoddard, *Marks in Books Illustrated and Explained* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985). As examples of studies that take handwritten entries presented in printed works as a fundamental source of a history of reading and interpretation, see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (Oxford, 1986), 75–79; Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy," *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78.
27. The fundamental work on the various definitions of the metaphor of the book in the Western philosophical tradition is Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt, 1981; 2nd ed., 1983).
28. On the difficult and controversial question of the shift from the *volumen* to the *codex*, see Colin H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London, 1983; reprint ed., 1987); Alain Blanchard, ed., *Les Débuts du codex*, Actes de la Journée d'études organisée à Paris par l'Institut de Papyrologie de la Sorbonne et l'Institut de Recherche et

d'Histoire des Textes, 3–4 July 1985 (Turnhout, Belg., 1989); and the revision proposed in Guglielmo Cavallo, "Testo, Libro, Lettura," in *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo, Paolo Fedeli, and Andrea Giardina, 5 vols. (Rome, 1989), vol. 2, *La circolazione del testo*, 307–41; Cavallo, "Libro e cultura scritta," in *Storia di Roma*, Arnaldo Momigliano and Aldo Schiavone, eds., 4 vols. (Turin, 1988–), vol. 4, *Caratteri e morfologie*, 693–734.